

Africa Great Lakes Initiative

A Month with AVP in Kenya

By Sandy Grotberg

The Beginning, May, 2004

There it was – an email announcement for an AGLI opportunity to facilitate AVP training in Western Kenya in August, 2004. I had had the privilege of being on such a team in June, 2003, and my heart leapt at the idea of returning. Not only would it be a chance to renew friendships but it would be a chance to marvel at the growth of skills and experience that has happened during this past year. Of course the small print always says “some fundraising required,” and my heart sank a bit. I was reluctant to ask again so soon the dozens of friends and family who had previously contributed. My aversion to asking for money stems from feeling selfish, that I am asking others to “give” me a trip to Kenya where I will have a richly meaningful experience and adventure. What I need to remind myself is that beyond the airfare, the money goes to the program – it enables other people to grow in their commitment and ability to build peace in themselves and their communities. Making a contribution is an investment in people and in peace. Then, at a family gathering a week after receiving the announcement, when I mentioned the Kenya opportunity and the required fundraising, two family members offered to fund the trip. I was astounded! Not only had “Way opened,” – Way had released the floodgates! Well, I digress. The money for this trip “happened” and after several communications we set up a training schedule for Kakamega and Kaimosi.

Meanwhile, my husband, Chuck Barbour, who has done a lot of HIPP training and who has been off work since December, 2003, recovering from some auto injuries, made it a goal for himself to be well enough to join me on the trip. His health was an issue right up to the week of departure, yet again Way opened – more subtly and tentatively than before but finally with a sense of peace. As we met with our supporting Friends in worship, we felt gathered and knew Love would accompany us and take us through times of fear or uncertainty.

En route , Friday, July 30 – August 3

Hoping we had taken care of the multitude of arrangements needed both for the trip and the homefront (lawn, shrub-pruning, pets, mail, bills, Meeting newsletter, etc.), we left Chambersburg the evening of Friday, July 30. We were fortunate to spend weekend time with two of my daughters and attend our grandchild’s first birthday celebration before flying from JFK Monday evening, August 2. Fortunately the flight was uneventful. While waiting at Heathrow between flights we talked to a woman who was leaving the States to teach for a year in Kenya, and while excited was also anxious. She’d been told tales about difficulty going through customs and finding one’s way through the airport. As “veteran” visitors to Kenya, we reassured her of the warm welcome she would probably experience and offered to help her if needed. (It wasn’t needed, of course.)

On the London-Nairobi leg of the trip I had a wonderful conversation with a young Irish woman who was supervising Irish youth volunteering for a few weeks in Kenyan schools. They are part of a youth empowerment organization with a Celtic name meaning “Upward,” and are trying to make a difference at home as well as abroad. She was very interested in AVP/HIPP, and who knows where that interest might lead?

Nairobi, Tuesday, August 3 – Friday, August 6

After over 20 hours either in airports or flying and a 7-hour time change, there, at the Nairobi gate at 10 p.m., Tuesday, August 3, were our longtime Kenyan friends, Winnie and Wally Hime, who welcomed us “home.” (We weren’t the only ones being welcomed – about 40 Kenyan youth soccer players were returning home from 3 weeks at a tournament in Norway, and the reception area was packed with excited family members.) We rested well at our friends’ home for a few days, even enjoying a few outings – the Butterfly House, a Masai Market, and a full day at Hellsgate National Park, with its lava pillars, gorge, and thermal power generation. I think it important to take time to appreciate a country’s natural and cultural treasures as well as the daily life and work we had come to do. We were fortunate to be able to do both.

We also spent an afternoon with Malesi Kinaro at the Uzima office (Uzima is one of our host organizations) and for tea at her nearby home. Joining us was Janet Ifedha, who had just returned from 4 weeks at an AGLI workcamp in Rwanda. She was experiencing re-entry to one’s homeland after an intense experience elsewhere. It does take awhile to assimilate and readjust on many levels.

Travel to Kakamega, Saturday, August 7

On Saturday, August 7, we arose early to be driven to the Easy Coach bus terminal near the Railroad Station. En route we passed the August 7, 1998 Memorial Park, the site of the former US embassy that was bombed this very day 6 years ago. Malesi herself had lost a sister-in-law and had been to the U.S. to observe the trials of some of the perpetrators. It is a somber reminder in the heart of a bustling city of the devastation and grief that are the fruits of hate. It reaffirmed our belief to work for the Alternative.

Janet joined us on the bus to Kakamega for the 9-hour journey. The bus was new and very comfortable, and the roads have had some improvement from a year ago. Leaving the city one notices the many roadside stands (dukas) selling food, plants, furniture, clothing, and the ever-present red and white Coca-Cola stands. The elevation increases from about 5000 ft. in Nairobi to over 7000 ft. at Limuru. At the higher levels one begins to get glimpses of the breathtaking Great Rift Valley, Mt. Margaret, and Mt. Longenot. I sighed with joyous nostalgia as we passed the turn-off to Kijabe where my daughter and her husband had worked last year at Rift Valley Academy, and where I had been present for the arrival of their first child, my first grandchild. Then we began the descent into the Rift – still awe-inspiring because of its geological immensity and beauty. Having been on this route many times now, we love to watch for herds of roadside zebra, gazelles, and impala and for the 3 lakes – Naivasha, Elementita, and Nakuru (the last 2 tinged pink because of the millions of flamingoes). Passengers were glad for the lunchtime stop for stretching and refreshment at a roadside café near Nakuru. Then westward we headed to Kisumu, located on the shore of Lake Victoria. We passed forests, grasslands, tea plantations, fields of rice and maize, and always people and livestock walking to some destination. Being on the highways takes some adjustment, not only to left-side driving, but also to local driving practices. With so many different sizes and speeds of vehicles on 2-lane hilly roads, there is much passing. Consequently you find yourself frequently riding up hills and around bends in the lane of oncoming traffic. After the first few panic attacks, one learns to either not look or just trust that drivers won’t push their impatience to the point of disaster before returning to the correct lane. Since last year there have been more strict limits on speeds and numbers of

passengers in vehicles, which have helped reduce traffic fatalities. Nevertheless, there are moments where one's heart is in one's throat, not unlike riding on our own busy (so-called) freeways.

The stop in the big city of Kisumu was brief, then northward to Kakamega, finally getting a glimpse of the Great Lake Victoria as we climbed back up into the hills. We know we crossed the Equator, but missed the sign. We knew we were getting closer to Kakamega as we passed Chavakali and the turn-off to Kaimosi, the roadstands selling giant pottery, the Weeping Woman Stone (a monolith), the road to the Kakamega Rain Forest, and finally the town itself. At the bus station I was overwhelmed not only to be met by Betty Etieno, who was now a member of our training team, but also by two friends from last year, Jane and Joshua, who had driven two hours just to welcome us. We were able to visit only shortly while they gave us a ride to our hotel, then they had to return home to Eldoret since it was beginning to get dark. (Joshua was going to be in the Training for Trainers workshop, but was unable due to the death of his brother.) We learned also that Susan and Evans from Kitale had traveled 3 hours to welcome us, but had to begin their return journey before we arrived (travel after dark is difficult and can be dangerous). I melted with these gestures that confirmed the warmth of relationships begun in the safe-haven of AVP workshops which are so conducive to intimacy.

Sunday, August 8

Sunday, August 8, was the day George Walumoli and Vicki Nakuti arrived from Uganda. George had just had a 5-week AGLI workcamp based at his home. Vicki is in her last year of theological school. We had worked together as trainers in Kakamega and Eldoret last year, I had visited their homes in Bududa then, and now we were going to be able to follow up with Advanced and T4T training with enthusiastic participants, many whom we had known last year. Joining our training team was Betty Atieno, a young woman who works for Uzima in the Kakamega region. She was one of the initial group of trainees who completed all 3 levels (Basic, Advanced, T4T) last year, and through initiative and dedication has helped with enough ensuing Basic Trainings to be qualified as a lead trainer for that level. Because many felt she was ready, we were including her on the training team for Advanced and T4T as part of the process of leadership development, so that Kakamega can have local people with experience to lead these advanced levels of training. Betty had done most of the local organizing for this training, so she had those details to mind (people, food, venue, accommodations, etc.) in addition to facilitating. Also joining the team was my husband, Chuck, who had heard stories and seen pictures from last year and who was able to add from his HIPP experience and just general love of working with people. As for myself, I felt more confident this year in understanding the structure and approach we were trying to achieve. Last year I was a "HIPP woman" in an "AVP world," and while much is interchangeable there are "cultural" nuances to learn.

Sunday afternoon we began our team-building and planning for Monday's first day of Advanced Training. We sat clustered on the small balcony of the hotel room in the equatorial sunshine, munching popcorn and biscuits (cookies), drinking cold drinks (sodas), speaking over the singing and sermons coming from a nearby church's loud speakers, acquainting and re-acquainting ourselves with each other. One of the strengths we developed as a team was a relaxed camaraderie – an ability to trust one another, laugh together, work and plan efficiently, and forgive and move on from mistakes. We were ready for Monday morning.

Monday, August 9

We walked 20 minutes to Nabongo Friends Church to set up for training. One of the challenges of the first day of training is to decide how long to wait before actually starting. Some folks have far to travel (1-2 hours in some cases), some are prompt regardless, some have misinformation on venue location and starting times, some just “know” the first day will start late, and sometimes we “think” someone may be coming but don’t know for sure. This time was no different – the first folks arrived around 8 am. While we were waiting for our group, many school-aged children dressed in Sunday clothes were arriving – they were traveling to a nearby school for a Church Camp and were very excited. It was quite a sight to see them pack into the back of pick-up trucks with luggage on an overhead canopy. As the vehicle groaned with its load, we prayed for safe travel of the church’s precious cargo.

We finally started right after morning tea, around 11 am. In addition to the 5-member training team, we had 10 participants, a wonderful group that included students, teachers, prison guards, social workers, and retirees. The first day of an Advanced training focuses on community-building and practice in consensus decision-making, following which the participants decide the focus topic(s) for the rest of the workshop. They gave us a prioritized list: HIV/AIDS, men-women relationships, child abuse, forgiveness, corruption, conflict resolution, humility, and fear. Well, we had our work cut out for us for the evening’s planning session! We also realized as we planned that particularly during the exercises on HIV/AIDS we would be emotionally challenged and need to support each other as well as our participants since each member of our team had been personally affected by the disease: we were wounded healers.

Tuesday, August 10

Participant arrival was punctual on Day 2 – out-of-towners stayed in town, which helped. Predictably, the Tuesday morning session on HIV/AIDS was somber, yet many felt relieved to release and share some of the emotional burdens they had been carrying. One of the differences between life in Africa and life in North America that I am beginning to understand more deeply is that death of loved ones is not an uncommon event to many Africans. It reminds me of the conversations I would hear from my grandparents about their childhoods. I know from a class I teach that in 1900 about 25% of U.S. children lost a parent to death. In my own grandparents’ case, 3 of the 4 lost a parent – one due to alcoholism, one to a fire from a lantern, and one in childbirth. Another example is in the book *Christie*, one of the games Appalachian children in the early 1900’s played at school recess was “funeral.” At that time families were the resource relied upon to care for the orphaned (not social service agencies), and they did. Similarly large numbers of children were common in families not only because of the need for labor on farms and lack of birth control, but also because probably not all children would live to adulthood, and you needed enough to have survivors who would help care for you in your own old age. So this era of our own history and in my own family is what I think of when my Kenyan friends talk about how many brothers and sisters they have (“we are 7, five survive,” for example) or about whom they have buried recently, not only due to AIDS but also because of malaria, infections, accidents, etc. And many are buried in the ground of their rural homes, so that one has the sense of the Circle of Life – one’s livestock graze on and one’s shamba (garden) grows from the ground holding the ancestors. Many of the people we encountered were raising or being raised by someone other than their biological nuclear family. All of this context, I believe, impacts how we do AVP and for that matter Trauma Healing workshops. In the US we often measure our effectiveness by the amount of emotion we see released (more tears = a better training). And

this may be an appropriate measure in our culture (though I don't believe anyone has the right to dictate how we grieve). But for places in the world or at times in history when death is a daily occurrence, I believe we need to learn about and to respect the ways people have found to endure over centuries. A wisdom born of experience is hard to challenge. On the other hand, for many there is power in naming our fears, our pain, our grief as well as our hopes, our strengths, our dreams. Creating safe spaces to share and talk about experiences and feelings not elsewhere expressible has been highly welcomed and is one of the aspects people appreciate about our work. It may not always come to tears – sometimes silence is the way, sometimes fervent vocal prayer has been the way, sometimes writing, song, dance, or drumming is the way, sometimes becoming active to change society is the way. One of the huge fears, of course, is stigmatization, especially with HIV/AIDS. Having two trainers from Uganda who explained how their country made great strides in removing stigmatization was valuable in offering hope. I believe there is something in the Human Spirit that looks for, finds, and clings to Hope. And I have learned from my Kenyan friends that great pain and great joy, great grief and great hope, can dwell in the same heart.

One thing about being “heavy” together is that after awhile we need to lighten up. A late morning rainstorm helped, especially when we turned our inability to hear each other (rain is loud on corrugated roofs) into an opportunity to play a game. And in the afternoon we all planned and performed skits where we saw much talent (two of the youth had been in national drama competition). Although the topics were serious (stigmatization, child abuse, corruption, men-women relationships), the stories incorporated much humor. There is a great bonding experienced performing together, acting a role other than oneself, and allowing ourselves to see each other in a new light. We were challenged to “re-wind” negative outcomes in the skits and go forward to show a positive ending.

We had tried to devise a way to determine who would be continuing for the Training for Trainers (T4T). We needed to know who was available, yet we also wanted to maintain the final say over who would participate. The participants needed to know if they were accepted in order to make plans in their schedules and because it was far easier to inform people while we were all together rather than after we scattered at the end of Day 3. Last year this had become an awkward situation, and we wanted a smoother approach this year. We decided just to be straight-forward, and passed around a list to see 1) if people were interested in further training and 2) if they were available for the one this coming weekend. We explained that their interest did not guarantee they would be selected, that sometimes we recommend people take some more Advanced Trainings to gain further understanding of AVP. This seemed to be an acceptable approach to all, and we were delighted that all were interested and all but two were available.

Well, Day 2 was a full spectrum day – emotional depths to heights – and we had Day 3 to plan in the evening. We came up with a mixture of activities to address the requested topics and agreed unanimously that all the participants could continue to T4T. We then collapsed to bed rather early, if I remember correctly.

Wednesday, August 11

There is a level of trust and comfort that settles in on an AVP training that, especially on the third day, allows an easy interweaving of the serious and the silly. We explored prejudice, fear, power, and forgiveness interspersed with riotous laughter during the Light & Lively's (games). We wrapped up the afternoon with affirmations, evaluations, a group photo, and graduation.

And of course all were thrilled to learn they would be back again Friday to learn to become trainers.

We had a free evening and the next day off – ahh! When we got back to our room we were greeted by Janet and an American AGLI workcamper, Eileen, who had worked in Burundi then traveled to Rwanda (where she met Janet), Uganda, and now Kenya. We cobbled up some refreshments and traded travel stories, being especially impressed with Eileen’s solo adventures. That evening George, Vicki, Betty and we went out for dinner together to celebrate completion of Training #1.

A note on food: while at the trainings, women from the Nabongo Friends Church had prepared us morning tea, a hot lunch (meat, greens, ugali, rice, etc.), and afternoon tea. All of this is accomplished in the mud-walled kitchen behind the pastor’s house on pots over open fires. Food was served on lovely embroidered table-cloths on the pastor’s front porch. We were well fed! Away from the trainings we were responsible for our own meals for breakfast and dinner. Occasionally we went to restaurants, but most of the time Chuck and I ate in our room – Wheatabix with raisins and yogurt for breakfast, bread, jam, and fruit for supper. Chuck found a used electric tea kettle which allowed us to have tea and hot chocolate and to boil water for drinking.

Thursday, August 12

On Thursday we enjoyed sleeping in and answering an unexpected knock at the door to find Shamala Joseph grinning, “Do you not know this face?” (He is a local youth pastor and was one of our key organizers last year.) We embraced and heard his excitement at his school choirs excelling at the National Competitions in Nairobi this past week and the Institutes in Peacebuilding he had been attending this past year. He feels he has found the direction God wants for him at this time in his life and is eager to pursue it. After our visit, Chuck and I joined Vicki and George for a late breakfast, wrangled with the bank when the ATM captured our card (our hometown bank had been suspicious of a Kenyan transaction and we’d forgotten to tell them of our travels), checked emails at an internet café (always a boost to hear from loved ones who are thinking about and praying for us), and prepared to join Janet at her mother’s home for dinner. A taxi drove us just outside of town to the house, where we were warmly welcomed. There were out-of-town family members visiting as well, in preparation for a prayer service that would be happening Saturday on the one year anniversary of the passing of Janet’s sister. They were expecting 200 people to join them, so preparations were extensive. It strikes me as a help in the healing process to formally take stock after a year, a positive ritual. It reminds me of a Jewish practice of gathering to unveil the tombstone several months or a year following a death. Betty had special interest in the visitors since one of them was her 7-year-old daughter who lives 2 hours away and is being raised by her family in Kisii. We encouraged the children to sing for us, and after overcoming initial shyness they sang some church songs. Janet, Betty, and Eileen had prepared a scrumptious meal – tilapia, avocado, rice, vegetables, etc. We had to get back for our planning meeting, so the taxi came back for us. The challenge, however, was a big thunderstorm that was muddying the road while we were eating, and our driver had several iffy situations in steering and avoiding people and not getting stuck. We all cheered when we got to the paved highway!

Our planning was relatively smooth – participants do a lot of the work in a T4T, so our role after the first morning is more as a coach. We were excited that we already knew our participants and were confident in their capacity to learn more about facilitation.

Friday – Sunday, August 13-15

Our participants arrived promptly at the Pastor's sitting room, where we had moved since others were using the church. And we had an additional person who had trained in Nairobi, David Zarembka's sister-in-law, Eunice. We presented the formal information about AVP, facilitation, working as a team, etc. Then we moved into 3 teams who would each plan a portion of a Basic Training and spent the afternoon coaching their preparations. As the day came to a close, they were anxious yet excited to be presenting the next day.

I once had a dance teacher who would, instead of correcting us, say, "I'm looking for a different quality." I found this helpful to myself at that time – instead of feeling clumsy or stupid or wrong, I was open to try again to attain that different quality. I find this idea of facilitation as a "different" style of leading to be particularly helpful, especially when participants are often local leaders in schools, churches, prison, and the community, and know those styles of leadership. Our participants seemed eager and open to practicing this style, yet at times struggled with old habits. They were the first to acknowledge this, however, and being aware of oneself is key to making changes.

So Saturday they led, debriefed themselves, and heard affirmations and critiques from us. Each successive group learned from the previous group's strengths and weaknesses, so each presentation improved from the last. They were thrilled and exhausted from a day of hard work and had considerable more appreciation of a trainer's job. Sunday was devoted to creating, setting up, debriefing, and de-roling roleplays. We celebrated with graduation activities and the anticipation of George, Vickie, and Betty coming back in two weeks to help them lead their apprentice Basics.

One of the "extras" that happened Sunday was the arrival of Susan, a woman whose spirit resonates in my heart. She is a school head-mistress and sponsored two of our student participants, Owen and Evans. She had traveled 3 hours to see us a week ago, thinking we would arrive early afternoon, and had to leave for home due to impending darkness before we arrived. She has a gift in helping troubled young people, both understanding them and channeling their energy in constructive directions. She has hosted AVP training in her school and is eager for more.

Another "extra" occurred for Chuck when the church pastor, Wilfreda, learned he is an electrician – the church and pastor's home currently (no pun intended – well maybe it is now ☺) do not have electricity. There were ongoing discussions of how this might be accomplished, and Chuck encouraged them to explore what they would need in finances, work, and materials. There seems to be a tug-of-war between doing "for" and doing "with" – of "giving a fish" and "teaching to fish." Some folks want something done for them because they are in need and see an opportunity for help – a legitimate stance. I feel very schooled in the belief, however, that in the long run we are all stronger working together toward a goal, empowering one another rather than increasing dependency. This is not to devalue advocacy and networking – they too are important when we feel no one will hear our voice.

Another issue that we need to get better at is clear expectations and arrangements regarding money for transportation, accommodation, and venue sites. We had some instances where there were either mixed or changed signals. One of the tendencies when outside money "comes to

town” is to figure out a way to “get some.” This is not unique to Kenya by any means, but as human as visits by rich uncles and grants of government contracts. (Can you say, “Halliburton?”) Nevertheless, in our own AGLI projects, part of the learning curve for those on the ground is to handle this perception with clear and firm guidelines that are explained to people in advance.

Monday – Tuesday, August 16-17

Monday was a day off, and we would travel to Kaimosi on Tuesday. We had a list of “last things” to do while in a town, since Kaimosi is more remote. We organized a bag of laundry that our room-cleaner, Mary, arranged to wash, then went out for breakfast. We checked and sent emails and did our grocery shopping at our usual Mama Watoto’s Supermarket, where we like to chat with the friendly uniformed guard, Gabriel. Chuck did some banking while I found a store with cheese. We climbed to the top of the Voi Hotel, where our team had stayed last year, so I could show Chuck the view and take photos of Kakamega town.

Then our team had company – Malesi Kinaro and David Zarembka had arrived from the Peace Church Conference in Nairobi, and Betty, Janet and Eileen came by, too. So 9 of us squeezed on our balcony. Since it seemed a special occasion, we had cold drinks brought up, and I broke open a pack of York Peppermint Patties I’d been saving. We had a great visit, hearing about the conference where Malesi had spoken, about the workcamps in Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, and about the Peace Center being proposed for Kakamega. One of the strengths AGLI brings is connecting people who otherwise might feel they are working alone – there is great encouragement we can give each other both celebrating our joys and sharing our burdens.

We spent the evening packing – ducking in and out of the clothes on the line we set up for some items that were still damp. Tuesday was Travel Day – we had an early lunch, then packed into Malesi’s car for her driver Fury (named after the black stallion on TV years ago!) to take us to Kaimosi. Chuck and I had spent a night in the Guest House there back in 1995, so we had a sense of familiarity as we arrived in the compound. George had attended Friends Theological College (FTC) as a student, and Vicki, Betty, and Malesi had done AVP training here earlier. Malesi was now on the team, so the six of us settled in to the house we would be sharing for two trainings. We had been a bit worried it would be colder in the forest setting of Kaimosi, but the weather was comfortable – usually clear in the mornings and a shower by afternoon. After a period of rest we began our planning for the T4T, enjoyed a good meal prepared in our kitchen by the woman who cares for the Guest House. Then we spread ourselves around the dining table and living room floor to make the charts and materials we needed. Since we had just finished leading a T4T we were relaxed and looking forward to the morning.

Wednesday – Friday, August 18-20

It was a short walk on a tree-lined dirt road from the Guest House to the Friends Theological College. Our participants were 15 third-year theological students – 3 women and 12 men – who arrived quite promptly. In mid-September they would be dispersing throughout the country for practicum experience. What an eager, bright group they were! Their earlier trainings had been a bit of a challenge, partially because in their lives as students they are boldly inquisitive and expressive. Now that they were familiar with AVP and becoming trainers themselves, all of us were focused on the same goal.

After the introductory information about facilitating, we divided into 4 teams to plan their presentations for the following day. One advantage of the students being on a campus was that they could meet in the evenings to complete their preparations. As a consequence, they were ready to roll Thursday morning. One of the things many teams did for Light and Lively's was to introduce Kenyan songs and games – What's the time Mr. Lion, a maize-grinding song and dance, a two-part song sung when a conflict has been resolved, etc. It is exciting to me when people take creative ownership and adapt to the local scene. Another good example of this had happened in Kakamega when one participant (Owen, I think) was explaining the parts of the Transforming Power Mandala, and how all parts are essential to the whole. "It is like the three cooking stones," he said, "if you take one away the pot will spill." It is a good local metaphor and powerfully conveys the idea of interdependence.

Friday was roleplay and graduation day. Roleplays are created to depict common conflicts (for example students-administration, family, maid-employer, land boundaries, etc.) They then become a vehicle to explore feelings and choices made by the characters, to watch for opportunities where Transforming Power may enter, and to openly discuss the issues raised in the whole group. Becoming a trainer requires ability to process these, so each student practiced a portion. Following graduation we took some group photos on the steps of the school and prepared for the weekend. The students needed to make materials for their apprentice Basic trainings, which would start Monday morning, so they had homework.

The Weekend – Friday - Sunday, August 20-22

Our team had the weekend free – Malesi had a wedding to attend in Kakamega, Betty had work to attend to in Kakamega, George and Vicki hung out with the students at FTC, and Chuck and I were dropped off at the Rondo Retreat in the Kakamega Rainforest. As Fury drove us, Malesi pointed out her childhood homes and where some of her family still lives. Although she spends most of her time in Nairobi, she, like most Kenyans, maintains a strong attachment to her rural home. The afternoon rains began as we arrived at Rondo – we hoped they would make it back okay to the main road (they did). I had spent two days at Rondo last year, and I was eager to share this place with Chuck – its cozy cottages and dining room, the meticulous lawn and gardens, the forest canopy full of wildlife, the walks with trained nature guides. It was a place to restore and refresh ourselves. It also is a place one meets interesting people. Among others I had met Patrick Nugent and Mary Kay Rehard from FTC here last year. This year there were 2 Australians volunteering at a hospital near the Tanzania border, there were Canadians overseeing a project in Kakamega that supports students by paying school fees, there were Dutch tourists, English nationals living in Nairobi, and a retired American pastor.

Chuck and I spent Saturday with our guide, Nicholas, on a hike to the Yala River. Though long, the way was easy – partly on a forest road, partly on a path. Nicholas explained many details about the forest, spotted the three kinds of monkeys (blue, red-tailed, and colobus), and named myriads of birds by either sight or sound. We even got a glimpse of the Great Blue Turaco, a rare bird which makes a great squawk and seems to be the first in the morning to rise. We had brought a picnic lunch, which we ate by the rushing muddy rapids of the river. And we made it back – tired but satisfied – and luxuriated in the solar-heated hot water shower.

On Sunday Chuck took a second forest hike while I stayed home and read. Last year my daughter had given me Elsbeth Huxley's *The Flame Trees of Thika* to read. This year I saw a copy at our friends' in Nairobi and asked to borrow it to re-read. The language, descriptions of Kenyan places and people in the early 1900's, and perceptions as told through the eyes of a 7-

year-old girl are just so rich – the book was still fresh a second time through. Then at the Kaimosi Guest House was a copy of the sequel, *The Mottled Lizard*, which my same daughter had just read and extolled the virtues of. So at Rondo I indulged in Elsbeth Huxley's second tale of her childhood world as an early settler in Kenya after World War I. When different individuals and different cultures interact and get to know one another, there is often an awkwardness, judgments made on first impressions, and then gradual mutual understanding. I think Huxley captures this well, though I'd like to read a parallel account written by a Kenyan getting to know the ways of Europeans. One of the jokes Chuck and I picked up from the books was a tendency for Europeans of that era to blame odd behavior on the "vertical rays" from the equatorial sun. I don't know what our excuse can be now that we're back in a temperate zone – the "slanted rays?"

Fury and Malesi picked us up in the late afternoon to return to Kaimosi and meet with our training teams. My group – George, Geoffrey, Leah, and Bernard had worked hard over the weekend and had their materials ready. We agreed on the first day's agenda quite quickly, they divided up their responsibilities, and I stayed until they had no more pressing questions. We had agreed to arrive early Monday morning to address further concerns and prepare our space.

Monday – Wednesday, August 23-25

We woke early to a sound we recognized as the turaco – yes, the first riser here at Kaimosi, too!

For the apprentice Basic Trainings we had four groups – 2 at FTC, 1 at a Friends Church just down the road, and the fourth a few kilometers up the highway at a Friends School. Participants had been recruited mostly from area churches – Friends and Pentecostal Evangelical Team (PET) in particular. There were rumors of over a hundred people coming, so we wondered how the first day would be. We were a bit dismayed when, at 9:30 a.m., there were 10 people total at FTC and 4 at the Friends Church. We decided to give folks more time to arrive, and begin with whoever was there after morning tea (about 11 a.m.). Well at FTC there were 17 people, so we combined the two training teams (Vicki's and mine) and adjusted the agendas. We later found out George and Betty had 13 at the church and Chuck and Malesi had 17 at the school. One of our guidelines is, "Be flexible" – we were! I really have to hand it to the teams we combined – each had been psyched up for presenting a full agenda, and each had to swallow a little pride, cede a little territory, and cooperate for the good of the training. Sure, we're not "supposed" to feel proud or territorial, but we're still human! Anyway, they were great about it.

Our participants were a good mix of men and women, youth and adult, and from a variety of professions. Our apprentice trainers were prepared, competent, positive, and effective. We enjoyed our evening planning sessions – a large team spread the work widely so each person had less to prepare. Vicki and I took a back seat since our apprentices needed the experience. Our one concern was that our team member, Benjamin, took ill with malaria and had to be hospitalized. His well-being was on our hearts throughout the training. (I still do not know how he is – he was taken to his home doctor on Thursday. The reality of disease strikes swiftly.)

On Wednesday, August 25, we invited all the FTC students to come to the Guest House for a party. We wanted to celebrate their achievement, plus it was Chuck's birthday and Vicki's was the next day. Shem helped arrange for biscuits and sodas to be delivered from Alec's Duka, and for some flour to make cakes. Our neighbor in the Guest House was Lorna, a Peace Corps volunteer who had a cookbook, spices for gingerbread, baking pans, and a working oven. We learned you can make baking powder from baking soda and cream of tartar – wow! Betty, Vicki,

and I spent the late afternoon baking. George and Chuck helped with some flour-sifting and giving “advice.” Malesi was packing because she was leaving. We made one gingerbread cake and 2 yellow cakes and were quite proud of ourselves!

Everyone arrived around 8 p.m. We sang “Happy Birthday,” ate sweets, played music, challenged the group with George’s “gravity stick,” and had good visiting all around, telling our training tales and getting to know each other better. The students then included us in their evening devotions with Bible reading, hymn-singing, and prayer (either in Luya or Swahili). I was mindful of John Woolman quoting a Native American who said, “I like to feel where the words come from.” That was our experience as the prayer grew passionate and fervent. We heard our names mentioned, Benjamin’s name mentioned, and for us the rest was feeling – the feeling of God’s closeness, of pouring one’s full vulnerable self before God, of belief and faith in being heard and answered, of the Presence that transcends words.

The time came to part from these beautiful young people, and I know we will carry a part of each other within as our journeys continue. There were two students we got to spend more time with – John Kidake and Leah.

Thursday, August 26

On Thursday, George, Vicki, and Betty left for Kakamega, arms laden with training materials. Chuck and I had decided to stay around Kaimosi and catch the bus to Nairobi at nearby Mbale on Friday. Our friend Wally in Nairobi had suggested we visit the Kaimosi Tea Estate where he knew the General Manager. Josphat, the FTC bursar, drove us there, accompanied by John, who could translate if needed and who had a relative who also worked there. We hadn’t been able to phone ahead, and weren’t sure how we’d be received. The manager was still at lunch, so we waited to be seen – first outside the security gate and later (just as the rain began) in the reception area of the office. Then John Kosgey invited us to his office very graciously, explained that Wally, a surveyor, had helped settle a boundary dispute with a neighbor, and then arranged for one of the younger plant managers to take us through and explain tea processing. Here we were with acres (or hectares, as they say) of tea shrubs around us as far as the eye can see, and we stood at the center where all the growers’ and pickers’ efforts come together. We saw the weighing, quality sampling (elegant simplicity using a 100-square “checkerboard” for the sample, then quality categories in separate boxes to get the percent of each quality), drying, sifting, oxidizing, taste-testing, etc. We weren’t allowed to take our cameras – both for industrial privacy reasons as well as for fear of misuse of pictures. Apparently in the past, pictures were distributed out of context claiming that workers were mistreated. Actually while we were there a Price-Waterhouse team from London was making an evaluation for rating the company for its investors. They examined not only worker treatment but also agricultural and manufacturing practices, such as the use of pesticides and chemicals. The General Manager explained that he had just recently come to the head job after a grooming process of 20 years. The young man who so knowledgeably showed us around is in the early stages of that process, since the next generation must be cultivated. The General Manager must have experience in and understand all phases of the operation, be able to relate to workers at all levels, be accountable to owners, etc. Imagine – long term planning and vision – it’s a concept we need more of in the U.S.

The estate is much like a village compound with housing, schools, healthcare, etc. They have preserved forested areas and more recently will buy independently grown local tea, and have just opened a shop near the outside gate to sell processed tea to local people. The General Manager drove us in the rain to this roadside gate (about a mile from the processing plant) where we

bought some tea and waited for a matatu (a transportation van). Of course this was the one time we hadn't brought our rain gear – oh well it is just water. Since it was around 5 p.m., people were headed home at the end of the day and trying to catch the last matatus. We squeezed in (along with some chickens) and rode the few kilometres to Kaimosi. A woman I sat next to said she had previously hosted American Quakers in her home, and was glad to hear of our work in the area. It's an odd experience to be in an area where Quakers are numerous – I'm used to being a minuscule minority.

We made some tea at the Guest House and waited for Josphat. He had spent the afternoon driving Benjamin to Kakamega, where he would be picked up by his mother to take him home to his own physician. We had been invited by Leah to spend the night at her home, which was very near the bus station on the main road in Mbale. Josphat had agreed to take us to Leah's upon his return from Kakamega. We waited patiently, knowing that Benjamin's needs were far more critical than ours. It was evening when we departed from the tree-canopied mission station, and we absorbed the beauty of our last sunset in western Kenya as we drove westward to the highway. The rain started up again, and we got as close as we could to Leah's home without getting stuck in the mud. We couldn't see much in the dark – torches (flashlights) helped as we unloaded our luggage. Leah had described her home as "semi-permanent" – mud walls and floors with wooden doors and shutters and a corrugated metal roof. She actually lives with her grandmother, who was currently away at Yearly Meeting, though sent her regards and her regret at missing us. The room we entered was warmly lit with a lantern, had two long dining tables with customary embroidered tablecloths and chair covers. Across the rafters were strung papers from used composition books that had been fringed and scalloped to give a decorative flutter. Family photos were hung, as is typical, high on the walls around the sitting room. Two family members had vacated their beds so we could have them, though Leah assured us there were plenty of places for family members to sleep. While she went to prepare dinner, she left us to chat with her 18-year-old cousin who spoke English quite well. She had completed high school and was now home to help on the shamba. She loves books and asked if we had any. We didn't have any we could leave that were "innocent" enough reading. Eventually dinner was ready, and just the four of us sat together – Leah, her cousin, Chuck, and I. We were learning this was customary for only a few people to sit with guests. Leah had thoughtfully inquired about foods we could eat (Chuck has numerous allergies – some severe), so we were able to enjoy the meat, greens, chapatis, and ugali. I was embarrassed to ask for a spoon, but I have not yet quite mastered using my fingers. They cheerfully accommodated me, though I think Chuck wished I hadn't asked. One does get these awkward moments of when to ask for what you want or need and when to follow custom. I hope we established enough of a meaningful relationship with folks that we could weather occasional blunders. I've also learned that we are quite easily forgiven since we don't "know better." And it is not taboo to ask for guidance occasionally.

We turned in for the night with our lantern and a thunderbowl (we were warned not to go outside during the night to the latrine since the watchdog could be vicious). We were a little concerned that on this last night we did not have mosquito nets and we hadn't found our bottle of insect repellent. When, in the middle of the night, we heard mosquitoes around our heads, and Chuck felt bites, we had a bit of a panic – "what have we done?" But there was nothing to do except bury ourselves under covers and hope that our anti-malarial medicine worked. We were later told that the mosquitoes carrying malaria are silent, and people usually don't even know they've been bit. Oh the dance of caution and relaxation, of fear and trust, of things we can control and those we can't – and not only the wisdom to know the difference but also the self-forgiveness when one messes up on something over which there had been an ability to control.

Friday, August 27

At the break of dawn, we had a small breakfast and went outside to look around and take a few photos of the family. Leah's house is actually one of three in the compound – her grandfather has 3 wives. In the yard children were sweeping leaves that had fallen on the grass during the night, a matter both of pride in neat appearance as well as removing hiding places for snakes. Some cows and calves were tethered to graze in the same area as horizontal, inscribed cement grave-markers. Many of the buried were the generation of mothers – the grandfather and three grandmothers of this family were raising several grandchildren. The previous custom has been that children who are orphaned stay with the father's family and that a widowed woman stays with the husband's brothers. This seems to be changing, especially if there is mistreatment of the children or wife (not uncommon, since they can become "second-class" family members). It is now not uncommon to return to the maternal home. Also, many children are born to unmarried young women, and though technically the children belong to the father, it is quite common now for these children to be raised by the mother's family. This is not unlike the major changes in U.S. families where half of marriages end in divorce and one-third of children are born to mothers who aren't married. In the U.S. we do encourage both parents to remain involved with the child. A huge difference, though, is that many Kenyan families are altered by death of a family member, a more rare occurrence in the U.S. As much as Kenyans are aware of and concerned about families in crisis, I observed some strengths which to me seem obvious because of the difference from my own culture, but may not be as obvious to people within the culture. One is that families do take their obligation seriously to provide and care for the extended family. Many families have taken in relatives whom they treat as their own, not as "second class." Many families help one another with school fees or medical expenses. Any one who achieves success is expected to "share the wealth" with other family members.

The second thing I observed was how cooperatively children play together. In rural areas, at least, children are expected to entertain and look after themselves for much of the time. They are included in work when able (I saw 3 and 4-year-olds singing and lining up ears of maize to dry), and volunteer to help when asked. Leah's younger family members vied to be the ones to help carry our luggage to the bus-stop, and she said when she got home the others would ask why they weren't allowed to help. When I wondered out loud why American children were often less helpful and less cooperative, Leah thought it was perhaps because we didn't cane our children to learn obedience. Kenyan children are taught they must behave and respect their elders. I believe we could attain the results without caning (Leah was doubtful). I think it has more to do with individualism vs. collectivism – somewhere there is a happy medium between individuation and knowing one's place within a community.

Our Easy Coach arrived on schedule, so we bade farewell to Leah and Mbale. The bus had many adults traveling with children who were dressed up and heading for schools or returning to Nairobi after visits to rural homes. We alternated between watching out the windows and sleeping – it was a little too bumpy to read. We watched for the landmarks we knew – Lake Victoria, Kisumu city, farmland and tea plantation, rest stops, Nakuru city, the 3 lakes, the climb up out of the Rift near Mt. Longenot, the turnoff to Kijabe and last year's memories, the gradual change to urban scenery, the August 7 park, the railway station, and the bus depot. Fury came to pick us up and take us to Malesi's home for the evening. We had a few hours of quiet visiting and a good meal prepared by her daughters. Then much of the family went out for wedding

preparations for the big event the next day. I went to bed early, tired from the day of travel, and Chuck stayed up talking to Malesi's sons. It is a challenge for Kenyan youth to find employment, even when they are well-educated. How they channel this energy of frustration is of concern to many, for some youth have burned schools and attacked faculty and other students. While Kenya is for the most part peaceful – we felt safe – there is worry about what's happening under the surface that could erupt violently. This is one reason Malesi thinks AVP is so important – to channel energy toward nonviolent positive change.

Saturday, August 28

We awoke Saturday morning, our last full day Kenya, to a houseful of relatives – a baby crying, cousins having a slumber party, daughters counting serving dishes for the wedding reception, mothers finishing adjusting the fit of the flower-girl's dress, and fixing everyone's hair – a joyous chaos! We had been invited to attend the wedding and would have loved to. However, this was the only chance we had to visit with a young couple who teach at Rosslyn Academy in Nairobi, Brent and Trina Siegrist, and their baby Anneka. Brent is the son of one of my lifelong friends from home, and we had seen them one time last year as well. Malesi took us to the place we'd agreed to meet. Our farewell was easy because she would be coming to the U.S. and staying at our house in just 2 weeks!

Where we waited was the Mayfield Guest House, a place for missionaries to stay and run by Africa Inland Mission (AIM). We had stayed there last year because my daughter and her husband had worked for AIM, knew it would be a comfortable place to wait, it was close to Malesi's home, and Brent and Trina knew where it was. We relaxed in the parlor with some tea, got some gifts in the craft shop, and visited with some of the guests. The Guest House has been around for 75 years and is a crossroads of people traveling to and from mission posts in East Africa. One man we talked to had grown up in Wales, belonged to the Calvinistic Methodist Church, had worked on and off in Africa over the years, and asked us about Quakers. He told us about his church's founder, Howell Harris, from the 1730's, but he was also familiar with George Fox. He noted that Fox had very much encouraged people to go out and preach the Gospel, but that in Britain the Quakers were too "autonomous," not wanting to submit themselves to Biblical Truth and Authority. We explained about Quakers in the States having 3 major branches, how it was FUM Friends with a pastoral background who were the main ones coming to Africa, and that our branch probably was more akin to British Friends. We don't proselytize but usually do service work. He said "proselytize" sounds like a dirty word – it's not how they like to think of themselves, but they do believe in the Great Commission to share the Good News. We had a healthy curiosity about each other's approaches, yet I always feel like we have code words and code questions to place one another spiritually in a box, and not without some judgmentalism on both parts. When, for me, a spiritual encounter with God is beyond articulation (and that is what I believe is a common experience, no matter our "box"), we can lose that commonality in the effort to articulate it.

Well, our friend Brent arrived, and after Chuck helped him address an engine over-heating problem, we headed to their home on the campus of Rosslyn Academy. The school, which borders on the grounds of the new U.S. Embassy, was started by 3 churches – Mennonite, Baptist, and Assemblies of God. Brent and Trina are Mennonite, met at college, and have been here for 2 years and 6 years respectively. Their baby, Anneka, was about 4 months old, was born in Kenya, but had just made the rounds of U.S. relatives, returning to Kenya at the beginning of August. They fed us a yummy lunch, Sloppy Sam (a vegetarian Sloppy Joe) on homemade bread. After the baby woke and was fed we headed to a nearby backyard garden for a book-

signing party. It was a beautiful setting – flowers, cactus, aloes, trees, a stream – though I felt a bit “colonial,” knowing the work was done by employed staff. A fellow teacher and friend of the Siegrists, Phil Dow, had just received copies of the book he had written about Rift Valley Academy (RVA), *School in the Clouds*. Many institutions are having centennial celebrations in Kenya – Kenyan Quakers recently published a centennial book – and this book coincides with RVA’s centennial. Our interest besides meeting the author was that this school has been known to us for the last 20 years. Our neighbors (and my youngest daughter’s nursery school teacher) taught there for about 8 years – their children graduated from RVA; as mentioned earlier, my daughter, Jen, and her husband, Jeff, spent the 2002-2003 school year there teaching and house-parenting twenty 13-year-old girls and had their first child, my first grandchild, Sophia. Chuck had spent a week and I had spent a month with them there last year. And my long-time family physician’s daughter has just married a surgeon from the Mission Hospital and now works as a school guidance counselor at RVA. The author had been a student there himself and is now a history teacher at Rosslyn. He explained that his thesis is that one reason the Kenyan population went from .2% to over 80% Christian over the last century is that the school, which was started for children of missionaries, allowed families to stay in Kenya and have a continuity of individuals in the field. Prior to the school, missionaries would often return home when their children became school-aged. Furthermore, the school reinforced the parents’ values and helped raise 2nd and now even 3rd, 4th, and 5th generation missionaries with a background of growing up in Africa. Having now read the book, I find another interesting premise the idea that missionaries helped foster a citizenry ready for independence. While colonial settlers saw native people as an uneducated work-force to be trained and kept subservient, the missionaries opened schools, translated Bibles to native tongues, and taught that we are essentially equal in God’s eyes (though may not have always treated people as equals). Beyond some valid criticisms of the missions, the author thinks the overriding effect was an undermining of Colonialism and cultivation of a group of educated articulate Kenyans who could handle their own affairs. In fact in Kenyatta’s first cabinet, almost all had gone to the same AIM Mission Secondary School. I think I’ve had mixed opinions about the legitimacy and effect of mission work. As a child I first heard about missionaries when I went with a friend to a Baptist Bible camp. It became one of my dreams to go to a foreign land and help others learn about God. However, this can become quite seductive – feeling a bit superior because we are doing God’s work and in general being appreciated because the need is great. The other danger is that if one wants to be a helper, there needs to be a helpee. Just like we are taught it is more blessed to give than to receive, if we are to be a giver, there must be a receiver. We can easily deceive ourselves into thinking we are somehow more blessed, not only as compared to our own previous self but also in comparison to others. So I try to resist being seduced and self-deceptive – or at least be aware of the dangers – and instead focus on the idea of exchange. I am both helping and helped, I am both giver and receiver, and God is present in the transaction. Interestingly, in a recent Wider Quaker Fellowship article by Malesi’s sister, Miriam Were states that all people learned about Christianity because people went “out” – otherwise the faith would only exist in Jesus’ homeland. Western Christians are misinformed if they think they are the originators of mission work!

Well, the book-signing party wound down. We had enjoyed talking with many interesting folks who all exuded that extra glow of working and living in an exotic, adventuresome place – that “my life isn’t going to be ordinary” attitude of which we were all extensions and therefore comrades. (Is it my Protestant upbringing that if it’s exciting and fun, there must be something wrong to be aware of?) We left after thanking our hosts, and traveled briefly to the nearby shopping complex, the Village Market – an intriguing mix of indoor/outdoor mall and intricate architecture. There we bought extra malaria medicine (cheaper than in U.S.) and unintentionally

sacrificed an ATM card to a machine. Since the bank didn't open until Monday it was irretrievable, though the guard said they would melt the card if not claimed. Anyway, for more details you can ask Chuck, whose idea it was to try! We concluded by visiting Jen's favorite ice cream shop for a treat. We scooted back to Rosslyn, where Winnie and Wally awaited our arrival and transported us to their home – another “welcome home.” We shared some of our tales over a late supper, said goodnight and kwaheri (good-bye) to their long-time worker Ifedwha, whom we would not see in the morning. I took a shower to save time in the morning, and went to bed while Chuck stayed up chatting with Winnie and Wally.

Sunday, August 29

Well, it was a 5:30 a.m. wake-up call, a quick breakfast, and departure by 6:30 to arrive at the airport on time – 2 ½ hours before flight time. We got through security without a problem and then waited, either reading or window-shopping in the departure arcade. Finally – take-off and farewell Africa again. It was a cloudy morning and became bright above the clouds, but ground features were mostly obscured. Where it became clearer is where the deserts began. It takes hours to fly over the Sahara – we kept imagining the Darfur tragedy somewhere below us in that vast expanse. The Mediterranean coastline eventually materialized, then more clouds over Europe until we got to London. We strolled the shops at Heathrow, and boarded our flight to New York City. (There had been rumors circulating that NYC flights would be canceled because the Republican Convention was starting and terrorism was at a higher risk – fortunately a false rumor.) With a combination of sleeping and reading, we passed the time, and gratefully landed around 10 p.m. Our cab ride to my daughter's Brooklyn home was obscenely expensive (especially by Kenyan and AGLI budget standards), but late at night we were just glad to arrive and arrive safely. Including the time change, we had been en route for 24 hours! We let ourselves into the empty apartment (luckily remembering after a month the “safe” place I had stored the key!), blew up the air mattress, and collapsed. A few hours later her husband, Robert, arrived – he'd been stranded at a Midwest airport due to weather, and we all slept in.

Monday – Tuesday, August 30 - 31

Robert had to go to work Monday as one of the NPR reporters at the Republican Convention, and we had a day to relax before traveling home Tuesday in time for my first evening class Wednesday. We took a subway into Manhattan, and just enjoyed walking around – watching all the fuss with traffic and cordoned off streets around Madison Square Garden for the convention, reading all the anti-Bush campaign slogans on people's buttons, shirts, hats, and signs. We rode down to Washington Square to learn more about demonstrations and protests, etc. NYC was not very welcoming of Republicans, at least at the street level! I returned to the apartment while Chuck stayed in town to get more of his fill of city energy and to catch Les Paul playing his usual Monday night gig.

Well, this saga has to stop somewhere. On Tuesday we drove home, our house was still standing, our cat played hard to get but then cozied up to us, and we began the resettling process. It would be more accurate to say this “chapter” of the saga was ending – the story continues. Malesi would be here in 10 days, speaking at our Friends Meeting and at Wilson College. And the work of AGLI continues to grow and transform lives, including my own.